

Thompson

Axis Prisoners of War in Tennessee

Coerced Labor and the Captive Enemy on the Home Front, 1941-1946

During World War II, Axis prisoners of war received arguably better treatment in the U.S. than anywhere else. Bound by the Geneva Convention but also hoping for reciprocal treatment of American POWs, the U.S. sought to humanely house and employ 425,000 German and Italian prisoners, many in rural communities in the South. This book examines for the first time Tennessee's role in the POW program, and how the influx of prisoners affected communities. Towns like Tullahoma transformed into military metropolises. Memphis received millions in defense spending. Paris had a secret barrage balloon base. The wooded Crossville camp housed German and Italian officers. Prisoners worked tobacco, lumber and cotton across the state. Some threatened escape or worse. When the program ended, more than 25,000 POWs lived and worked in Tennessee.

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